



City of Seattle

Seattle Planning Commission

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Katie Sheehy,
Planning Analyst

September 27, 2012

President, Michael Debell
Seattle School District Board of Directors
MS 11-010
PO Box 34165
Seattle, WA 98124-1165

RE: Fund Downtown School in BEX IV Levy

President Debell,

In our capacity as the steward of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan), the Planning Commission urges inclusion of funding for a school downtown in the Building Excellence IV (BEX IV) Capital Levy. Seattle's Comp Plan sets forth a vision of a livable city for all residents, including families with children. In order for Seattle to retain, attract, and support families as the city grows, it is essential that those neighborhoods anticipating the greatest amount of population growth include great public schools. Schools are a fundamental part of what makes neighborhoods complete, livable communities. Correspondingly, it is critical that these schools be located in places where people have the greatest access to transit, jobs, and housing.

Recent actions taken by the City demonstrate a commitment to significantly increasing residential populations in the greater downtown area including South Lake Union, Yesler Terrace, and South Downtown. The City is planning for more than 60 percent of Seattle's housing and employment growth in the next 12 years to be absorbed within Seattle's City Center boundaries (map attached). Queen Anne's John Hay elementary school, which many downtown students currently attend, is already over capacity due to growth in the student population in downtown and surrounding areas.

Locating an elementary school downtown has previously presented a chicken-egg conundrum consisting of waiting for enough school-age children to warrant the capital investment then watching families move away as children got closer to school age precisely because there is no downtown school to serve their needs.

However, Seattle has now reached the point at which such a school is needed in order to better serve the increasing number of downtown families with school-age children, to enable the increasing number of families with young children to continue living in their downtown neighborhoods, and to ensure that the city's future growth welcomes and includes families.

A school in Seattle's downtown area not only makes good planning sense and helps leverage downtown investments in transit and infrastructure, it will also afford easy access to an amazing cornucopia of hands-on learning opportunities. Classroom and afterschool visits to area museums and institutions such as the Science Center, EMP, Children's Theatre, SAM, Wing Luke, Seattle Aquarium, Benaroya's Sound Bridge, and Myrtle Edwards Park would enhance lessons on virtually any subject. The proximity of major employers in information, biotech and additional fields also offers the potential for unique educational partnerships. The chance for families to secure such an engaging and quality education for their children, in many cases near the parents' own workplaces, will make a downtown school and the neighborhood around it attractive to scores of families.

In fact, there are already strong indications that families in downtown Seattle with young children will be much more likely to remain living downtown with a public school nearby. Parents who participated in the Downtown School Feasibility Study focus groups indicated this desire and the South Lake Union Neighborhood Plan encourages the siting of a school within this urban center. Experiences of other cities also demonstrate a growing preference for downtown urban schools. For example, in Vancouver, BC, a school was built in the downtown Yaletown neighborhood to serve both the pioneering families living there as well as the anticipated additional families that would be attracted to the neighborhood. They have since been so successful in attracting and keeping families downtown that they are now securing funding to build a second elementary school in the area to meet the high enrollment demands.

The rezone currently under consideration by the Seattle City Council will make South Lake Union an increasingly popular residential and employment center. Proposed development standards and incentives would facilitate siting a school serving north downtown while also supporting housing development at a variety of price points, additional transportation infrastructure, community centers, green streets and other family-friendly services such as daycares.

For all these reasons we believe the time to plan and secure funding for a school to serve downtown neighborhoods is now, within the BEX IV levy. This is a truly opportune time for the School District, the City, private developers, non-profits, and the public to join in creating a complete and livable urban neighborhood in the heart of Seattle. We urge you and your colleagues on the board to seize this opportunity.

Thank you for considering our recommendation. Please contact me or our Director, Barbara Wilson at (206) 684-0431 if you have questions.

Sincerely,
David Cutler, Chair



Seattle Planning Commission

Attachment: Map of City Center Seattle

cc: Seattle Mayor Michael McGinn
Seattle City Councilmembers
José Banda, Superintendent, Seattle Public Schools
Darryl Smith, Julie McCoy; Mayor's Office
Pegi McEvoy, Lucy Morello; Seattle Public Schools
Diane Sugimura, Marshall Foster, Gary Johnson, Tom Hauger, Jim Holmes; DPD
Holly Miller; Seattle Office for Education
Jack McCullough, Kate Joncas, Jon Scholes; Downtown Seattle Association

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION RECORD OF DISCLOSURE & RECUSAL:

- Commissioner David Cutler disclosed that his firm, GGLO, is involved with projects in the South Lake Union area and with projects that could be impacted by a new school in the downtown area.
- Commissioner Kadie Bell Sata disclosed that her employer, EnviroIssues, has done work with the City of Seattle and other potential stakeholders.
- Commissioner Catherine Benotto disclosed that the firm for which she works, Weber Thompson, is located in South Lake Union and is designing several projects for developers within the area.
- Commissioner Luis F. Borrero disclosed that his firm, DRiVE, has a strategic partnership with Heartland LLC, which is working in South Lake Union.
- Commissioner Josh Brower disclosed that his law firm, Veris Law Group PLLC, works on single- and multi-family projects throughout the City of Seattle.
- Commissioner Colie Hough-Beck disclosed that her employer, HBB Landscape Architecture, has worked with Seattle Public Schools in the past and may again in the future. HBB also works on Infrastructure projects in SLU. Commissioner Hough-Beck also disclosed that she lives and works in the South Lake Union neighborhood.
- Commissioner Bradley Khouri disclosed that his firm, b9 architects, designs single-family and multifamily housing throughout Seattle.
- Commissioner Amalia Leighton disclosed that her employer, SvR Design does engineering and/or landscape architecture work for the Seattle School District.
- Commissioner Chris Persons disclosed that his firm, Capitol Hill Housing, is a member of the Housing Development Consortium of Seattle and King County (HDC) and that he serves on the board. He added that HDC has adopted a formal position on the SLU Rezone.
- Commissioner Matt Roewe disclosed that his firm, Via Architecture, is involved with property owners in the South Lake Union area and he is a member of the Uptown Alliance and the Queen Anne Community Council both of which will probably take a position on the South Lake Union rezone.
- Commissioner Morgan Shook disclosed that his firm, BERK Consulting, has worked with the city of Seattle on two projects on the South Lake Union rezone and is currently working on a project with the Seattle Public School District.
- Commissioner Sarah Snider disclosed that her employer, LMN Architects, does architectural and planning work in Seattle.

Center City Seattle's 10 Neighborhoods

